The Russo-Japanese war of February 1904 to September 1905, was the outcome of competing expansionist ambitions on the part of both combatants, who aimed to extend spheres of military, naval and economic influence over Manchuria and Korea.\(^1\) Japan’s initial foray into mainland Asia during the Sino-Japanese war (1894-95) had been thwarted by the adverse reaction of the great powers. Russia had strengthened its own position in Manchuria during the Boxer rebellion of 1900, reneging on a subsequent agreement to withdraw the more than 100,000 troops it stationed there. This heightened tension with Japan, which in 1902 signed an alliance with Britain. By late 1903 war was increasingly likely, and Japan took the initiative in February 1904 with attacks on the Russians at Port Arthur and landings in Korea, prior to an invasion of Manchuria. Almost all the military and naval engagements went in favour of the Japanese, although the Russians’ aptitude for timely fighting withdrawals avoided catastrophic defeat on land. Nonetheless, in January 1905 the Russian garrison at Port Arthur was forced to surrender following a siege lasting more than four months. Japanese victory in February/March at the battle of Mukden (the largest ever, at that point, in world history in terms of troop numbers) confirmed their domination in the field, although the losses sustained ensured that Japan was not in a position to carry on the fight for much longer. The spectacular success of Admiral Togo in annihilating the Russian 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) Pacific squadrons (which had journeyed from the Baltic) at the battle of Tsushima in late May left the Russians with few options but to consider peace negotiations. The Treaty of Portsmouth (New Hampshire), brokered by US President Theodore Roosevelt, brought the conflict to a close, with Japan gaining the southern half of the island of Sakhalin along with the Liaotung peninsula in Manchuria. Public opinion in both belligerent nations accepted the settlement reluctantly: Russia’s repeated wartime humiliations contributed to domestic unease and the outbreak of the 1905 revolution, while in Japan what were thought to be the treaty’s meagre gains fuelled widespread rioting quelled only by the imposition of martial law. In the longer term Japan’s success transformed the geo-politics of East Asia and the Pacific, as well as being globally recognised as the first time a European power had suffered defeated at the hands of an Asian state. For some this was confirmation of the ‘yellow peril’, for others (especially colonial peoples), it was
the harbinger of a new age. Russia’s defeat impelled it to refocus its ambitions on south-eastern Europe and to strengthen its defensive alliances, first with France and, in 1907, with Britain. It was the existence of this ‘Triple Entente’ that helped shape the broader context whereby the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June 1914 led to the outbreak of the First World War a month later.²

Throughout the Russo-Japanese war British sympathies were largely aligned with Japan, although there was a clear reluctance to become too closely embroiled, especially while there was any risk of the intervention of either France or Germany.³ Once it was evident that this geographically distant war would be relatively self-contained, there was great interest in its progress on land and sea. The fact that the Japanese navy was, in part, modelled on the Royal Navy (with some vessels being British-built) allowed observers to view its accomplishments as a vicarious endorsement of Britain’s maritime might. The set-piece battles and the titanic confrontation around Port Arthur encouraged military attaches and press correspondents to draw lessons (not always accurately) for the future shape of European warfare.⁴ Quite apart from the interest of those ‘in the trade’, the British public more generally was very receptive to news of the war, the outcome of which, at least up until Tsushima, could not be predicted. The scale of the conflict dwarfed anything in which British troops had been engaged since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and the losses suffered by both sides appeared horrendous in scale, albeit they were to be outstripped very swiftly a decade later on the fields of France and Flanders. Public interest in the conflict spawned a breadth of products aimed at a British domestic audience. Most major tobacco manufacturers produced cigarette card series devoted to the Russo-Japanese war, and issuers of picture postcards also found the conflict fertile subject matter.⁵ Illustrated magazines (such as Cassell’s History of the Russo-Japanese War) ran to multi-part volumes, while the weekly Graphic and Illustrated London News carried many images of the war and its leading figures. ‘No war in prior history’, writes Frederic Sharf, ‘had ever been observed as closely, or recorded in so many formats ... technological advances came together with new market forces and tastes to produce a stream of
consumer products devoted entirely to the conflict." Editorial cartoons in the popular press were one such product.

Given the war’s popularity in the British print media of the time, that little scholarship has been devoted to its visual representation speaks volumes about the fact that the conflict was soon to be overshadowed by the ‘war to end all wars’. Glenn Wilkinson utilises some examples from the Russo-Japanese war in his works on the depiction of war in the Edwardian press, but his focus is not on the conflict and its representation per se and, as discussed later, his analysis of visual imagery tends towards the literal and superficial. This is an absence not rectified by work on other European nations, notwithstanding essays by Falt on Finland and Lehner on Austro-Hungary.

This essay considers the commentary on and interpretation of the Russo-Japanese war offered by cartoons appearing in two popular British newspapers. The *News of the World* was Britain’s most successful Sunday newspaper, with a rapidly rising circulation exceeding 1 million by 1906. The *Western Mail* was a leading provincial daily, published in Cardiff. Both newspapers had been owned by the same consortium since 1891, and both employed the same political cartoonist, Joseph Morewood Staniforth (born Gloucester, 1863, died Lynton, 1921), one of the most prolific and popular ‘black-and-white’ artists of the early twentieth century. The *News of the World* carried Staniforth’s cartoons on the front page of each issue. The *Western Mail* printed them amidst the editorial and news pages. Over a thousand Staniforth cartoons were republished in various stand-alone volumes, both themed and general collections, in the course of his career, testament to their enduring appeal, at least during the cartoonist’s lifetime.

The Staniforth cartoons that appeared in the *News of the World* and the *Western Mail* during the Russo-Japanese war were almost entirely specific to the two papers. Although, between 1899 and 1903, most Staniforths in the *News of the World* had already appeared in the previous week’s *Western Mail*, such republication was rare from 1904 onwards. Illustration 1 provides one of only two such examples from the total corpus of cartoons, and the only example of minor alteration to the artwork as well as to the captioning. [PLACE
ILLUSTRATION 1 NEAR HERE] The explanation for such transformations is the time lapse of four weeks between the publications and the altered context in respect of the ‘Malacca incident’ and the tensions between Britain and Russia in respect of Russian interference with neutral shipping.13

A survey of the two newspapers reveals the prominence accorded to the conflict both in leader columns and in editorial cartoons. From late December 1903, when the prospect of war became pressing, to the conclusion of the Treaty of Portsmouth in September 1905, the *News of the World* carried 57 editorials on the war (out of a total of almost 90 issues – there being two, three or four leaders per issue) and 30 cartoons. It was the most prominent topic of the time. For the *Western Mail*, being a regional (Welsh) paper, other subjects such as the ‘Welsh Revolt’ in respect of the 1902 Education Act were more to the fore, but nevertheless there were 48 cartoons (of a total of 364) dedicated to the war, as well as dozens of editorials, making it the major international issue covered.14

There were, over the course of the conflict, three clear peaks of interest. The first covered the build-up to and the outbreak of the war (from December 1903 to March 1904), the second focused on the progress of the land war culminating in the surrender of Port Arthur (September 1904 to January 1905) and the third the peace negotiations and settlement (August to September 1905). But there was no month in which the war did not attract the attention of both leader writers and cartoonist.

Editorial columns and cartoons were not automatically identical in content or approach. The artist’s interpretation may have been influenced by the views of his employers and his editors, but cartoonists (especially those, like Staniforth, who enjoyed a personal profile) also had the independence and licence to express their own ideas. Investigating the relationship between cartoons and leader columns has the capacity to reveal both convergence and divergence in attitudes. The absence of any evidence of reader responses to specific cartoons makes it difficult to be certain as to their reception. Nevertheless, cartoons were drawn to be understood, and may thus be interrogated with the objective of revealing something about the intellectual horizons and ideological preferences of both the artist and his readership.15
The News of the World certainly regarded war as a calamitous occurrence ('perhaps one of the greatest evils that ever convulsed the world' – 27 December 1903) and one that was clearly the outcome of rival aggrandisements ('each is demanding from the other what belongs to someone else' – also 27 December 1903). The same edition’s cartoon ('The Shadow in the East') was echoed in the following week’s leader, titled 'The Shadow of War', which recognised that 'by no device of statesmanship, by no diplomatic subtleties can the ambitions of Russia and Japan be reconciled' – 3 January 1904). Staniforth used 'A Lot Depends Upon the Gee-Gee' (28 February 1904) to make the point that the inefficiencies of the Siberian railway might well cost Russia when it came to timely reinforcements arriving in Manchuria and mocked Russian military pretensions (revealed to be illusory) in 'A River of No Importance' (8 May 1904). The cartoons were sometimes ahead of the editorials: Staniforth’s 'A Tough Nut To Crack' (24 July 1904) suggested the determination of Russian resistance in Port Arthur a fortnight before the leader writer drew a parallel between the garrison’s fortitude and that displayed by the British forces besieged in Ladysmith in 1899-1900. And the peace settlement was celebrated with great enthusiasm both in sketch ('Peace Victorious!', 3 September 1905) and in text ('an unparalleleled piece of generosity, a triumph of cautious wisdom that has astonished the world ... it was the Japanese who made peace' – also 3 September 1905).

That there was no serious dissonance between editorial opinion and cartoonist in the News of the World may be ascribed to the fact that British opinion on the war was relatively settled (unlike, for example, public opinion on the South African war of 1899-1902). Japan was Britain’s ally, and British interests were not threatened by Japan’s success. Russia was a threat to Britain in South Asia and at sea, and the possibility of Russian co-operation with another European power to mount a challenge to British naval or imperial supremacy was taken seriously. Russia was seen as the aggressor in the Far East, and there was widespread admiration for the way in which the Japanese conducted themselves during the conflict (see 'Two Cubs Bagged', 8 January 1905). Japan was viewed as a gallant underdog, while Russian performance was judged pitifully inept ('Pride That Goeth Before A Fall', 23 October 1904). Russian interference with British shipping, combined with the Dogger Bank incident of October 1904
where the Russian fleet on its way to the Pacific opened fire on British fishing trawlers in the North Sea, placed Britain's relations with Russia under additional strain (‘The Sheep Worriers’, 4 September 1904, ‘Brought To Book’, 30 October 1904). There was broader hostility towards Russia on the grounds of the reactionary nature of its regime, which meant that the protests that led to the 1905 revolution were received sympathetically, and subsequent state repression and fuelling of anti-semitic violence with horror and disgust (‘The Light of the World’, 15 January 1905, ‘Becoming General’, 9 July 1905).

Close examination of Western Mail editorials and cartoons reveals a similar pattern of neither serious or prolonged divergence in stances taken nor any unidirectional or necessarily intimate relationship between the two forms of commentary. There were occasions on which editorial and cartoon were closely aligned. One example is the issue of 28 December 1903, when the leader writer remarked on the irony that it was not so long ago that Tsar Nicholas II had been the leading force in proposing the 1899 Hague Convention on disarmament but now was on the brink of going to war with Japan. The cartoonist in ‘Precept and Practice’ drew a similar contrast between the Tsar as the Angel of Peace on the one hand and the Tsar as armed to the teeth confronting the Japanese on the other. But there were instances of the cartoonist taking a stance that was echoed at a later date in a leader column. Illustration 2, dated 19 January 1904, highlighting the potential for King Edward VII’s mediation, was a theme picked up in an editorial only on 23 February 1904. [PLACE ILLUSTRATION 2 NEAR HERE] Further, there were occasional examples to be had of clear dissent between the potential message to be read off from the cartoon and the leader appearing in the same issue. Thus, on 8 February 1904, while the editorial identified Russia as the aggressor in the ‘inevitable war’, Staniforth’s ‘The Undesirable Burden’ depicted Russia and Japan working equally hard to shift responsibility for the conflict onto each other. Illustration 3 matched a haunting image with a leader claiming that Japanese troops ‘knew no fear of death, and ... sacrificed their lives with appalling prodigality’, but the metaphor that their assaults ‘dashed human lives like hailstones against the fortifications’ clearly did not match the more destructive image provided by the cartoonist, which at least suggested that Japanese pressure was causing the Russian defences to break up.
Japan was lauded in the editorial of 31 August 1905 for having ‘sacrificed a great deal’ in agreeing to a settlement (‘her generosity as an adversary is incalculable; her determination as a foe unconquerable’) but for the cartoonist the following day (‘All For Her’) the ‘appeal of humanity’ to which the Japanese had responded had left the Japanese Emperor empty-handed, while Tsar Nicholas could leave the conference chamber cheerily raising his cap, a bundle of ‘Japanese concessions’ under his arm.

Given that both newspapers were owned and managed by the same consortium, and that the Russo-Japanese war was not an issue that was responded to with any marked difference by Liberals or Conservatives in Britain, it is hardly surprising to find that the editorial columns of the News of the World and the Western Mail were in rough alignment on the war’s causes, progress and outcomes. Owing to its regional location, there was understandably a keen interest expressed in Western Mail leaders and cartoons as to the impact of the war on the South Wales coal trade (editorials of 23 December 1903, 6 January, 19 February, 1 March 1904, and cartoons ‘A Questionable Character’ (20 February 1904) and ‘Fly-Fishing in Eastern Waters’ (21 January 1905)), but in most other respects it is difficult to identify any significant variation in approach to the key issues raised by the war. The Western Mail was more explicit in addressing Western paranoia over the ‘advance of the yellow peril, equipped with modern armaments and fired by the ancient enthusiasm of their pagan religion’ (8 February 1904), and ran an editorial titled ‘The Yellow Advance’ on 1 April 1904. The cartoonist, by contrast, steered clear of such pejorative constructions, although in other contexts (including Irish nationalists, Jewish immigrants, or militant workers) he was prepared to utilise demeaning racial or ethnic stereotypes.

These findings differ somewhat from Glenn Wilkinson’s otherwise valuable work on the News of the World. Although Wilkinson does emphasise the importance of cartoons for helping develop an understanding of British popular attitudes towards war, observing that cartoons ‘depend upon [the] active participation of readers’, Wilkinson’s methodology for analysing the images of war does not
distinguish sufficiently between the authorship of cartoons and that of editorials or other news coverage. Such conflation of cartoonist and newspaper is perhaps a by-product of Wilkinson’s failure to identify (in this case) Staniforth by name. Understanding cartoons (and cartoonists) as simply visual representations of a newspaper’s unified point of view fails to acknowledge first, that many readers would have recognised the cartoons as specific to ‘JMS’ (the initials by which Staniforth signed every image), second, that ‘JMS’’s articulation of his own views took place across more than one publication, not being confined to the *News of the World* and third, that there was scope for newspapers to articulate more than one opinion.

Wilkinson does, however, give due weight in his analysis to the visual dimension, and it is clearly vital when evaluating newspaper cartoons to treat their imagery and artistic references as an integral part of both their commentary and of the means by which they seek to communicate with their readers.

Editorial cartoons were usually serious, especially those dealing with war and the loss of life, but Staniforth did occasionally make use of the Russo-Japanese conflict as an ostensibly humorous metaphor for domestic politics. Illustration 4 poked fun at the Liberal Party over its attitude towards the ‘Chinese labour’ question in South Africa, and Illustration 5 mocked the leadership of the trade union the South Wales Miners’ Federation, at the same time referencing a famous (and much less comic) *Punch* cartoon of the same name (1 February 1905).

[PLACE ILLUSTRATIONS 4 AND 5 NEAR HERE] Other targets for which the Russo-Japanese war was pressed into service included amendments to the Licensing Bill (‘Executing the Chunchuses’, *News of the World*, 12 June 1904), the Rhondda Urban District Council Education Committee (‘Emulating the Russians’, *Western Mail*, 7 November 1904), and the opponents of tariff reform (‘Targets for Foreign Powers’, *Western Mail*, 28 November 1904).

As Wilkinson notes, realistic cartoon depictions of actual fighting or its aftermath, as offered by Illustration 6, were rare.

[PLACE ILLUSTRATION 6 NEAR HERE] ‘A Weather Chart’ (*Western Mail*, 16 March 1904) depicted the shelling of Port Arthur, with Russian bodies visible, and Illustration 3 returned to
the same theme, although this time it was Japanese soldiers’ heads that were being dashed upon seawall defences. More regularly, use of stereotypical or stock characters allowed conflict to be represented in more controlled and domesticated form – as a sporting contest (‘The Great Wrestling Match’, *News of the World*, 14 February 1904) or as a stylised confrontation between man and animal (‘The Race for Mukden’, *Western Mail*, 7 September 1904; ‘Pushing Him Off The Map’, *News of the World*, 11 September 1904 and Illustration 1).

Table 1 provides information on the stock characters Staniforth most regularly deployed in order to communicate the essential events of the war. Russia appears to have been relatively straightforward to represent: mostly as a bear (sometimes ‘Bruin’) or as the Tsar, occasionally as a stereotypical Russian officer, and on just a few occasions as a named general (Kuropatkin) or admiral (Rozhdestvensky). There were a few Russian wrestlers, peasants, and Mother Russia was drawn twice. Japan presented a greater problem, perhaps owing to relative ignorance in Britain (at least before the war began to attract serious attention) of Japanese culture and politics. Emperor Meiji made three appearances towards the end of the war, but most regularly Japan was depicted by an army officer, sometimes by a soldier, and on occasion by a named admiral (Togo) or general (Oyama). There were also representations of Japan as a dog, a wolf (Illustration 7), a bull, a wrestler, a safecracker, a magician and a diplomat. During the Sino-Japanese war Staniforth had drawn Japan as a frog and a fighting cock. The prominence (at least in the cartoonist’s mind) of British interests explains the frequency with which John Bull found his way into the cartoons, and there were standard representations of the great powers in stereotypical form (as listed in the table, but also including Kaiser Wilhelm II and Italy). [PLACE ILLUSTRATION 7 NEAR HERE]

[PLACE TABLE 1 NEAR HERE]

In his cartoons, Staniforth regularly referenced works of literature and art. Shakespeare was a favourite, as evidenced by Illustration 6 (*Macbeth* (Act II, Scene 4) – in relation to the Russian defeat at Sha-Ho in October 1904) and Illustration 8 (*Troilus and Cressida* (Act V, Scene 4)), but was often supplemented by Don Quixote (Illustration 9). Other works employed included
As You Like It (Western Mail, 2 November 1905), Othello (Western Mail, 2 September 1905), Richard III (News of the World, 28 February 1904), Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (News of the World, 12 November 1905) and the Ingoldsby Legends (News of the World, 2 April 1905). Interestingly, News of the World editorials also alluded to familiar literary tropes – most often Dickensian (see 24 January, 28 February 1904 – both to David Copperfield). [PLACE ILLUSTRATIONS 8 AND 9 NEAR HERE].

As a keen amateur artist and student of Victorian and Edwardian art some of Staniforth’s cartoons were also part homage to, part pastiche of, what were presumably to his readers sufficiently familiar visual images. Making reference to Marcus Stone’s ‘The Peacemaker’ (Western Mail, 11 November 1903, News of the World, 18 June 1905) was straightforward enough when one was personifying states in conflict, and William Quiller Orchardson’s ‘Hard Hit’ could be utilised (News of the World, 19 March 1905) to represent Russia’s defeat at Mukden. The symbolism of Holman Hunt’s incredibly popular ‘The Light of the World’ was a powerful statement of the significance of the early stages of the 1905 revolution (News of the World, 15 January 1905). Illustration 10 brought together both Frank Dicksee’s best known work and the ballad of John Keats in marking the catastrophic outcome of the attempted breakout on 13 April 1904 from Port Arthur of Russia’s Pacific Squadron, whereby Admiral Makarov’s flagship the Petropavlovsk was sunk, taking to the bottom both Makarov and 662 Russian sailors.21 [PLACE ILLUSTRATION 10 NEAR HERE]

Not all cultural references were so elevated. Pantomime (Jack and the Beanstalk – Western Mail, 6 September 1904, The Babes in the Wood – News of the World, 10 January 1904), popular song (Rudyard Kipling’s ‘The absent minded beggar’ – Western Mail, 15 February 1904) and nursery rhyme (‘Hush a bye baby’ – News of the World, 21 May 1905) as well as contemporary advertisements (Illustration 2) could be utilised for telling motifs.

Given the wealth of evidence revealed here of the use of a range of cultural and artistic prompts for conveying messages about the Russo-Japanese war, Wilkinson’s argument that Staniforth’s News of the World cartoons (specifically – Wilkinson does not engage with the Western Mail) were aimed at a working-
class audience and thus operated on a relatively simple level seems both inaccurate and patronising.\textsuperscript{22} There is evidence that the \textit{News of the World} enjoyed a broad readership socially and this study suggests no marked difference between the readerships of a supposedly ‘working-class’ \textit{News of the World} and a ‘middle-class’ \textit{Western Mail} in terms of their ability to comprehend (for example) Shakespearean motifs.\textsuperscript{23} And this was not a matter simply of the cartoonist parading his education, for \textit{News of the World} editorials not only employed Dickensian allusions (as mentioned above) but also drew on historical parallels with the South African, Franco-Prussian and Napoleonic Wars, with (21 February, 3 July 1904), as well as with the military history of ancient Greece (5 June, 2 October 1904). Historians of popular newspapers need to shed any a priori presumptions about the characteristics of their customers and interrogate the evidence on its own terms.\textsuperscript{24}

The Russo-Japanese war could be viewed by Britons with a measure of detachment. It was a conflict which took place on the other side of the world, did not involve British troops, and whose outcome presented no direct threat to British interests. The colossal nature of the conflict both on land and sea left observers awestruck, but the war appeared both to the cartoonist and to his readers to be a relatively safe laboratory in which experiments on the future nature of modern warfare could be conducted. Cartoons were one mechanism by which the sublime horror of this modern, industrial type of warfare might be rendered comprehensible and digestible. Through the use of familiar imagery and recognisable literary, cultural and artistic tropes cartoons might act as a medium by which the complex and the appalling could be translated into both concise summaries of the situation and moral lessons for popular understanding. J. M. Staniforth’s work, which reached a substantial audience across the United Kingdom, \textit{may have made an important contribution to} enlightening the public as to the causes, events and outcomes of what has been termed ‘World War Zero’.\textsuperscript{25}

2 Kowner, “High Road”.

3 For the context see Nish, *Anglo-Japanese Alliance*.

4 See Hamilton, *Staff Officer’s Scrap-Book*; Ferris, “Turning Japanese”; Neilson, “‘That Dangerous and Difficult Enterprise’”.

5 Wills, for example, issued two series totalling 150 cigarette cards. Others were produced by Anglo, Cohn Weehen, Glass, Godfrey Phillips, John Young, Muratti, Newbegin, Ogdens and Taddy. Hill, *Picture Postcards*, 26; Dower, “Yellow Promise / Yellow Peril”.


7 Wilkinson, *Depictions and Images*; “Literary Images”; “‘The Blessings of War’”.

8 Falt, “The Picture of Japan”; Lehner, “A Different View”. Also see Bryant, “A Floating World at War”.


11 Williams, “Staniforth, Joseph Morewood”.

12 Williams, “Passports to Oblivion”, 145.

13 The British P&O liner *Malacca* was commandeered by the Russian cruiser *Smolensk* in the Red Sea on 14 July 1904, an act described by the *News of the World* (31 July) as an ‘outrage upon our mercantile flag’. The other duplication was of “The Throne and its Shadow”, which appeared in the *Western Mail* on 30 July, and (unchanged) in the *News of the World* on 28 August 1904.

14 That nine cartoons on the war were reproduced in Staniforth’s 1908 deluxe volume *Cartoons* is further indication of the war’s prominence in his oeuvre.

15 A more extensive discussion of the methodological issues involved is in Williams, “‘Our War History in Cartoons is Unique’”.

16 Staniforth had used the same title (but different image) to make the same point in the *Western Mail*, 23 February 1904.

17 See Williams, “‘Our War History in Cartoons is Unique’”.
Other examples include the editorials and cartoons of 4 January, 15 February 1904, 3 January 1905.


Ibid., 129.


Wilkinson, *Depictions and Images*, 64, 75.

See Brake and Turner, “Rebranding the *News of the World*”, and Conboy, “Residual Radicalism”.

Discussed further in Williams, “Passports to Oblivion”, 150-2.

See Steinberg et al. (eds), *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective*. 